

PHOENIX!

The official newsletter of the **Alliance to Save Hinchinbrook Inc (ASH)** PO Box 2457 Townsville Q 4810 Dec 2006

In late November 2006, work began at Oyster Point on the breakwalls approved by the Commonwealth and State governments.

The construction method was to dump truckloads of rubble, fines and rock into the sea, tidy it by excavator, then drive another truckload over the work just completed to start the next section. ASH Media Releases and images follow.

OYSTER POINT “DANGER: FALLING ROCKS” !!

The breakwater walls under construction at Oyster Point are falling into the deep soft silts of the Hinchinbrook Passage.

The sinking of the breakwalls has used up rock far in excess of the estimate of rock required to build them, and in places has displaced the seabottom to the surface.

These two facts have led to breaches of the Approval conditions.

ASH says that work must stop, wrongs must be corrected, and the Approvals reassessed.

Approval for breakwaters was granted by the Commonwealth Government after refusal by two previous Commonwealth Environment Ministers, Senator John Faulkner and Senator Robert Hill.

The purpose of the breakwaters was to “improve” the entrance to the *privately owned* Port Hinchinbrook Marina and Canal Estate. The Applicant however was the Cardwell Shire Council.

A condition of the Marine Parks permit was that water quality must not be diminished, and that “fines” must not be used.

A Commonwealth condition was that only large clean angular rock be used, sourced only from the local Stony Creek quarry, the existing source of rock for Port Hinchinbrook Marina/canal estate.

The blasting area in the quarry is right at the boundary of State Forest listed as *Essential Habitat* for the *Endangered Mahogany Glider*. Because the quarry was already almost expended, ASH feared that important habitat would be lost by blasting for rock in the adjacent State Forest.

Ms Moorhouse said “It took us months for ASH to get written government assurances that Stony Creek quarry would not be extended into the essential mahogany glider habitat of the adjacent State Forest.”

“In our submissions we had predicted that the breakwalls would sink, and much more rock would be needed than the quarry could supply. Our clearly written explanations were ignored.”

“In the event, the breakwalls were not even a quarter finished when Stony Creek quarry ran out of rock”.

In direct contravention of Approval conditions, fines from Stony Creek quarry and rock from Murray Upper have been dumped onto the sinking walls. Apart from the unlawful dumping of fines, water quality is now at risk from the exposure of the seabed pushed up as the rocks descend.

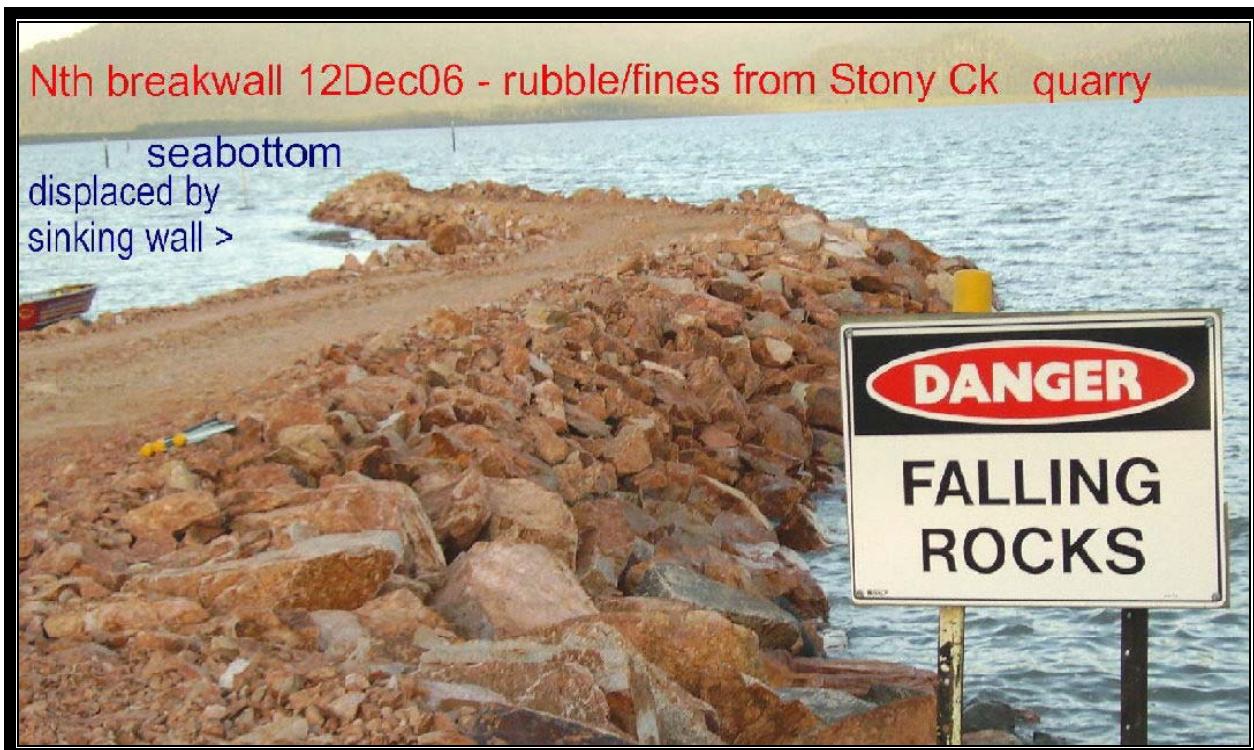
Ms Moorhouse said “Seabottom silts are like the acid sulphate soils of the development site. They have potential to produce sulphuric acid when exposed to the atmosphere, as noted in the Council’s own Application documents. Sulphuric acid robs the sea of forms of calcium needed for the growth and health of fish and crustaceans”.

“We opposed this project because of its long term effects on the World Heritage listed Hinchinbrook Passage, because an ugly experiment in a World Heritage Area was unacceptable, and because we have no doubt that the breakwalls are not the answer to the Port Hinchinbrook Marina’s long standing and well-known excessive siltation problems”.

“Now the Commonwealth and State Approvals have been flouted. The collapsed walls must be removed” Ms Moorhouse concluded.



1. Oyster Point 13 December 2006. At a tide height of 2.6 m (tidal range 4 m) the seabottom can be seen pushed up by the rubble deposited to build the breakwalls.



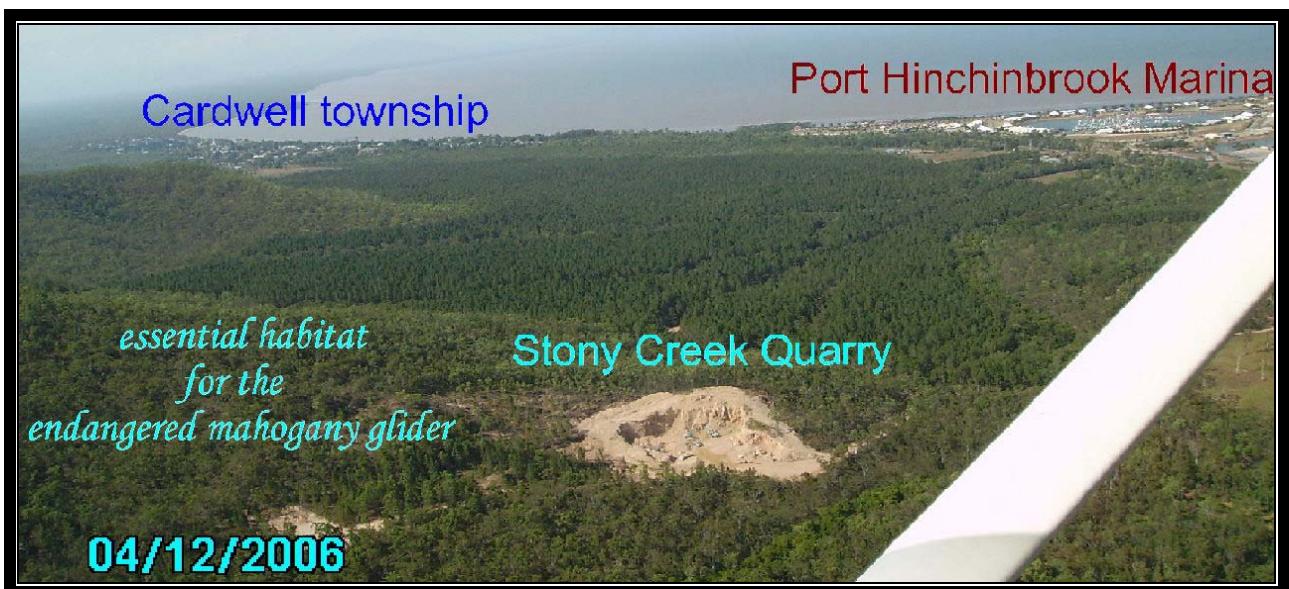
2. The start of the northern breakwall 12 December 2006, tide well up. The sign was prophetic. A drop in the breakwall can be seen towards the far end, also the adjacent seabottom pushed up to the surface. MV "Ian Fairweather" on the left edge of the photo.



3. Port Hinchinbrook Marina 24 November 2006. Dredge at work. Spoil is pumped via very long floating pipe to site south of Grande Canal (Stony Creek).



4. Northern breakwall 22 December 2006. The truck is on the sinking section, heading shorewards.



5. Cardwell district 04 December 2006. Stony Creek quarry is very close to Port Hinchinbrook Marina & canal estate, and is set in essential habitat for the endangered Mahogany Glider.

OYSTER POINT: **WHO WILL PAY FOR SINKING BREAKWALLS?**

The cost of the subsidence of the breakwater walls under construction at Oyster Point has blown out.

The increase in rock required due to the walls collapsing and sinking has resulted in a sharp increase in the cost, and has pushed the soft seabottom sideways into the dredged area.

The purpose of the breakwaters was to *reduce the developer's cost* of ongoing dredging in the access channels to the *privately owned* Port Hinchinbrook Marina and Canal Estate. The Applicant however was the Cardwell Shire Council.

Why the local shire has taken on this expensive and risky project for a private developer has never been satisfactorily explained.

A letter (Nov 23) from Cardwell Shire Council advised ASH that all material would come from Stony Creek quarry, a condition of their Approval for the breakwalls.

Within days of the Council's letter, trucks began carting rock from a quarry at Murray Upper – an additional 60 km of travel and an hour's idle time for the excavator for every truck load.

The same letter advised - after work on the breakwalls had begun - that the Council was yet to obtain a legal commitment that the developer would pay for the project.

The blow-out in budget and lack of secure contract may have long term ramifications for this very small Shire, the public purse, and the environment.

Margaret Moorhouse said "What if Cardwell Properties doesn't pay? Keith Williams has now stated publicly (CH 7 news 28 Dec 06) that Council would not have to pay. We did not hear Mr Williams explain who would pay, nor say that he or his development company would pay."

"In any case" Ms Moorhouse said "public statements are not legal contracts. Mr Williams made similar statements about the huge ongoing costs of the maintenance dredging. While reassuring the public that Council would not have to pay for it, Mr Williams has privately asked Port Hinchinbrook residents to pressure Council into paying."

"With construction costs blowing out and environmental issues looming, Council needs a contract backed by a large cash bond, to protect its ratepayers and the environment" Ms Moorhouse said.

"We opposed this project because of its long term effects on the World Heritage listed Hinchinbrook Passage, because this ugly experiment in a World Heritage Area was unacceptable, and because we have no doubt that the breakwalls will not be the answer to the marina's excessive siltation problems".

"We are now concerned that the existing environmental problems will be exacerbated by dispute as to who will pay" Ms Moorhouse concluded.

Within days of work starting, mud welled up alongside the new work. By mid December parts of the northern wall had begun subsiding, collapsing, sinking, into the deep, super-soft and fluid mud of the Hinchinbrook Passage. "DANGER FALLING ROCKS" had become a reality.

Meanwhile the rapidly silting Port Hinchinbrook marina was being re-dredged (yet again) and the spoil pumped to the developer's land south of the Grande Canal (Stony Creek) despite news that the "temporary" spoil ponds are all full and no more would be allowed.

Please alert your own MP and also write to the relevant state ministers: Andrew Fraser (Local Government); Lindy Nelson Carr (Environment); Kerry Shine (Natural Resources & Water) and Tim Mulherin (DPI, Forestry).

Please let Senator Ian Campbell, Commonwealth Environment Minister, know that his ill-advised Approval has resulted in an unacceptable engineering experiment in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

See also website: www.hinchinbrook.info/ash

Your Committee sends Season's Greetings, for a Safe, Happy and Healthy New Year.